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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

RIN 0648-XG279

Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone Off Alaska; Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Crab Rationalization Cost Recovery Program

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

ACTION: Notification of fee percentage.

SUMMARY: NMFS publishes notification of a 1.85 percent fee for cost recovery under the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Crab Rationalization Program. This action is intended to provide holders of crab allocations with the fee percentage for the 2018/2019 crab fishing year so they can calculate the required payment for cost recovery fees that must be submitted by July 31, 2019.

DATES: The Crab Rationalization Program Registered Crab Receiver permit holder is responsible for submitting the fee liability payment to NMFS on or before July 31, 2019.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Kurt Iverson, (907) 586-7210.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background

NMFS Alaska Region administers the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Crab Rationalization Program (Program) in the North Pacific. Fishing under the Program

began on August 15, 2005. Regulations implementing the Program can be found at 50 CFR part 680.

The Program is a limited access system authorized by section 313(j) of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act). The Program includes a cost recovery provision to collect fees to recover the actual costs directly related to the management, data collection, and enforcement of the Program. The Program implemented under the authority of section 313(j) is consistent with the cost recovery provisions included under section 304(d)(2)(A) of the Magnuson-Stevens Act. NMFS developed the cost recovery provision to conform to statutory requirements and to reimburse the agency for the actual costs directly related to the management, data collection, and enforcement of the Program. The cost recovery provision allows collection of 133 percent of the actual management, data collection, and enforcement costs up to 3 percent of the ex-vessel value of crab harvested under the Program. The Program provides that a proportional share of fees charged for management and enforcement be forwarded to the State of Alaska for its share of management and data collection costs for the Program. The cost recovery provision also requires the harvesting and processing sectors to each pay half the cost recovery fees. Catcher/processor quota shareholders are required to pay the full fee percentage for crab processed at sea.

A crab allocation holder generally incurs a cost recovery fee liability for every pound of crab landed. The crab allocations include Individual Fishing Quota, Crew Individual Fishing Quota, Individual Processing Quota, Community Development Quota, and the Adak community allocation. The Registered Crab Receiver (RCR) permit holder must collect the fee liability from the crab allocation holder who is landing crab.

Additionally, the RCR permit holder must collect his or her own fee liability for all crab delivered to the RCR. The RCR permit holder is responsible for submitting this payment to NMFS on or before July 31, in the year following the crab fishing year in which landings of crab were made.

The dollar amount of the fee due is determined by multiplying the fee percentage (not to exceed 3 percent) by the ex-vessel value of crab debited from the allocation. Specific details on the Program's cost recovery provision may be found in the implementing regulations at 50 CFR 680.44.

Fee Percentage

Each year, NMFS calculates and publishes in the **Federal Register** the fee percentage according to the factors and methodology described at § 680.44(c)(2). The formula for determining the fee percentage is the "direct program costs" divided by "value of the fishery," where "direct program costs" are the direct program costs for the Program for the previous fiscal year, and "value of the fishery" is the ex-vessel value of the catch subject to the crab cost recovery fee liability for the current year. Fee collections for any given year may be less than, or greater than, the actual costs and fishery value for that year, because, by regulation, the fee percentage is established in the first quarter of a crab fishery year based on the fishery value and the costs of the prior year.

Based upon the fee percentage formula described above, the estimated percentage of costs to value for the 2017/2018 fishery was 1.85 percent. Therefore, the fee percentage will be 1.85 percent for the 2018/2019 crab fishing year. This is an increase of 0.28 percent from the 2017/2018 fee percentage of 1.57 percent (81 FR 32329, July

13, 2017). Although direct program costs for managing the fishery increased by 2.9 percent from 2016/2017 to 2017/2018, the increase in the fee percentage was more affected by a \$24.0 million decrease in the value of the crab harvested under the Program. Similar to previous years, the largest direct program costs are incurred by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game and the NOAA Office of Law Enforcement.

Authority: 16 U.S.C. 1862; Pub. L. 109–241; Pub. L. 109–479.

Dated: July 16, 2018.

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National Marine Fisheries Service.

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